

Customer Care or Nightmare!

How to win over Customers and Keep Them for Life

Clive Price; Jean B. Dean



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1st edition

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Preface



An eye-opening insight into how customers are often treated once they become part of the establishment. Like many marriages, once the excitement of the chase is long forgotten, complacency often creeps in. Take care of your customers and nurture those client relationships.

Any successful company knows that *'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush'*...but why not have both?

This book will show you how to maintain excellent customer care and keep them coming back for more.

1 Passion

Alarming statistics show that more than 89% of customers, who leave companies, do so because of an attitude of INDIFFERENCE from a staff member.

Customer relationships are not dissimilar to courting and romantic relationships. First you have to ‘woo’ the customer by the products and services you offer and get them as passionate about them as you are. Next, they have to learn to trust you and have faith that what you are saying and promising them is absolutely true. Never ‘over-promise and under-deliver’. Once you have that trust you get commitment and before you know it you are in a relationship, which will hopefully, with the right care and attention, be long-term and ideally for a lifetime.

Okay, you have reached the honeymoon period and it’s time to share your new relationship with the world, or rather your colleagues and business team. Your internal sales and account handling team; and this includes everyone from the receptionist to the boss, can be likened to your friends and family – you will be relying on them to look after your client and bring them into the fold – but they need to be taught about this new relationship and what expectations the new member to your client list has for your brand.

Your goal is to provide quality service to each and everyone every time they want you to do something.

The FIVE core values of Customer Service are:

1. Courtesy
2. Integrity
3. Listening & Understanding
4. Taking ownership
5. Quality Service

Courtesy

Courtesy is showing thoughtful attention to other feelings and wishes, and treating them with respect and sincerity.

- Resolve requests on the same day. If you cannot, explain the reasons to them and provide them with a response date.
- Address them appropriately. Use their name and treat them as you would like to be treated.

Integrity

Is being truthful, open and fair to our customers all the time...

- Inform customers what you are doing and how long it will take to complete the task.
- Provide complete and correct information if you cannot meet the customer's request. Explain why you cannot meet the request and give alternatives to the customer.
- Be professional and admit if a mistake has been made. Then follow this up with what you can do to rectify the situation.

Listening and Understanding

You need to listen attentively in order to understand your customers' needs...

- Ask questions, open and closed questions, to understand their enquiries and give them your full attention.
- Do not use technical jargon when talking to customers. This will just confuse and frustrate them.
- Listen to ensure that you understand what they are saying, especially if they are reporting a problem, also establish what emotions are behind what is being said is. Ensure you are listening to understand and do not just respond instantaneously.
- Try and see the problem from the customer's point of view.

Taking Ownership

Finding a solution to a problem or inquiry...

- The buck stops with you. Take ownership of the problem or situation and try and find a solution.
- If you cannot solve the problem, find someone who CAN solve the problem.

Quality Service

High standards of knowledge and processes to ensure consistency...

- Create a culture that is customer-focused and places a high value on delivering excellent service.
- Don't be thrown off course by queries and complaints. See them as opportunities to improve your service.

It's no big deal!

It's paying close attention to small details that add up to the quality of customer service...

- Respond to people without being chased by them.
- Keep your colleagues informed about what's happening on a project.
- Respect others by doing the correct things, e.g. arrive on time for meetings, don't interrupt, be friendly, put your own excellence in manners on display for all to see and appreciate.

2 Some Facts About Your Customers

96% of dissatisfied customers do not complain to **you** about the poor service, they simply vote with their feet and go somewhere else.

In their book entitled '*Deliver Outstanding Service*', Derek and Susan Nash share some very interesting facts about customer retention. Their research was based on answers from customers who were asked: 'What single factor influenced your decision **not to use a product or service again?**'

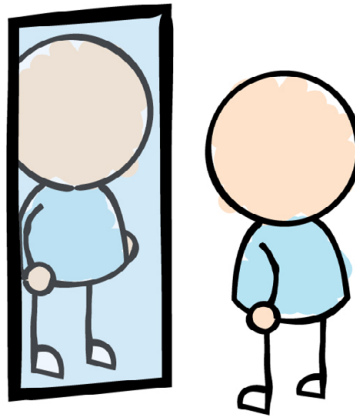
Did you know...?

- The biggest single reason why customers leave is indifference of one employee (68%).
- 66% of annual sales come from existing satisfied customers. Some businesses receive almost 100% of their new business from existing satisfied customers and the referrals they make to others.
- Approximately 13% of dissatisfied customers will tell more than 20 people of their problem.
- 96% of dissatisfied customers do not complain to **you** about the poor service, they simply vote with their feet and go somewhere else. We usually only hear from 4% of our dissatisfied customers which means that for every complaint we do receive there are 26 other customers who have a problem but don't complain.

CHOICE

If we want to change our world,
we need to first change ourselves

To do this, we can actively choose
to **see the good in** our work,
our colleagues,
our customers,
our family and
our friends...



For some of us, the first step is to choose to see the good, the talent and the potential in...
OURSELVES!

The 10 Commandments of GREAT Customer Service



“We only have a few rules around here,
but we really enforce them.”

1. **Know who is boss**
2. **Be a good listener**
3. **Identify and anticipate needs**
4. **Make customers feel important and appreciated**
5. **Help customers understand your systems**
6. **Appreciate the power of “Yes”**
7. **Know how to apologize**
8. **Give more than expected**
9. **Get regular feedback**
10. **Treat co-workers well just like your customers**

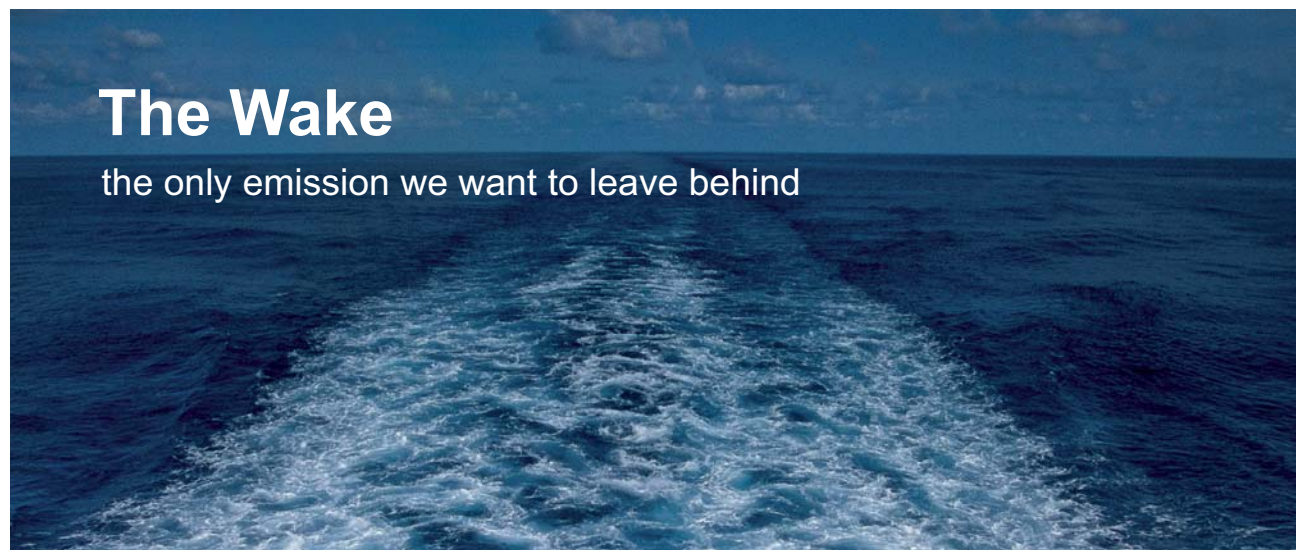
3 Attitude & Behaviour

Attitudes are extremely contagious. Is yours worth catching?

Companies and individuals who deliver excellent service time and time again have the same thing in common – a customer-friendly attitude. This means that they view their customers as the most important part of their jobs. Customers, in reality buy, everything you have, your house, clothes, furniture, food, your children's food and schooling, etc. In return we should have a sincere appreciation for them that they chose to do business with your company and with you.

Every day you are surrounded by:

- Ringing telephones
- Meetings to attend
- Computer data to enter
- Deliveries that have to be signed in
- Fires to put out
- Angry customers screaming at you
- Demanding customers




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Two things that you have to remember through all of this are to communicate with people and establish and build relationships. Through effectively communicating with people you will go far and also if you establish good relationships people will use your company more.

You can make the difference.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS YOUR CUSTOMERS

“We are not doing him a favour by serving him; he is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so”.

Mahatma Gandhi

Exercise 1:

Choose those customer attitudes that you prefer most and then pick a winner:

1. Anyone for whom we provide a service, or who has a need for what we supply.
2. The most important person to come into this organisation, whether in person, on the phone, or by mail.
3. The person who ultimately pays my salary – I work for the customer.
4. Not someone with whom I should argue; someone with whom I will learn patience, even though he/she is not always patient with me.
5. Someone I take care not to offend – even when they are wrong.
6. Someone who is sometimes a challenge. I embrace this challenge and am glad when I can turn a frown into a smile.
7. Someone for whom I should go the ‘extra mile’.
8. A customer is the most important visitor on our premises...
9. He is not dependent on us, we are dependent on him.
10. He is not an interruption to our work – he is the purpose of it.

Exercise 2

In the spirit of the above attitudes, create a punchy, memorable personal statement of your attitude towards your customers

(15 words or less).

MOMENTS OF TRUTH

A moment of truth is a brief instant connection with a customer, usually no longer than 20 seconds but they have a lasting impact on your customer and their perception of you and your company. 'Moments of truth' are encounters with customers, which cause them to form a view of the organisation based on how they are engaged, particularly compared to their expectations.

Expectations can be met, exceeded or disappointed. Moments of truth can therefore be positive, in the case of meeting and exceeding expectations, or negative, in the case of disappointment. Monitoring the 'moments of truth' allows the company to focus on improving areas responsible for negative customer experiences.

Remedial action to prevent repetition is crucial. A single mistake is forgivable. A repeat rarely is!



"Your call is important to us.
Please stay on the line
until your call is irrelevant."

If you put things right your, customers will see that they are important to you. Put things right and you will be seen as a supplier who knows how to manage quality.

Organisations that fail to put right things that go wrong, might as well say to the customer, "You are not important to us". Failing to put things right and to prevent reoccurrence says of the organisation "We are not capable of managing quality service."



Bear in mind also that research has proven time and again that when an issue of poor service to a customer is satisfactorily resolved by a supplier, the customer increases their loyalty to the supplier to a higher level than existed prior to the problem.

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BEHAVIOUR

Behaviour towards our customers

Our challenge is to help our customers feel valued and special when they deal with us. Let us turn the tables – remember you too are a customer at shops, restaurants, banks, garages, the post office, Telkom, cell phone companies, Home Affairs and many more product and service suppliers.

Some examples of positive behaviour with customers

- Greet customers cheerfully. Use their name when possible. SMILE!
- Show respect by listening – give them your individual attention.



Fortunately, his training had prepared him to deal with all types of customers.

- Ask questions to clarify exactly how you can help.
- Stay calm under pressure – calm tone of voice, positive body language.

ACTION AND EFFICIENCY

Great service needs positive behaviour AND action/efficiency.

Some examples:

- Be reliable and keep your promises.
- Under-promise and over-deliver.
- Always keep the customer informed if something goes wrong (the worst part of waiting is the uncertainty of how long the wait will be).
- Do more than the minimum.

4 The Customer Is Always Right!

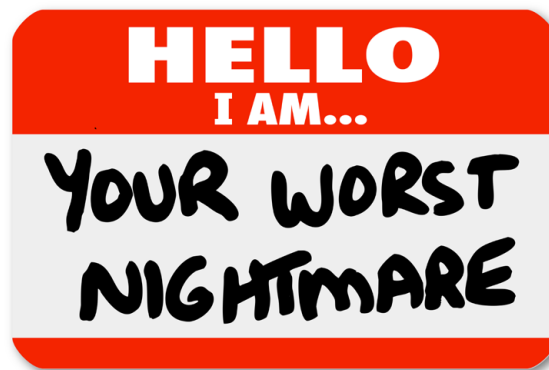
What? Even when they are wrong?

“THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT”

The spirit of this statement is good. The logic, however, does not always hold true.

- Customers are human, and make mistakes
- Not all customers are 100% honest

So, how can we deal with customers when they are wrong?



“HELP THE CUSTOMER *FEEL* RIGHT”

Our attitude and behaviour can go a long way towards achieving this:

Attitudes:

Courteous, friendly, helpful, calm, win-win, professional

Behaviour:

Questions/clarity, listening, positive body language and voice tone, express appreciation, clearly explain actions and solutions.

PEOPLE WILL FORGET EXACTLY WHAT YOU SAID AND DID,
BUT PEOPLE WILL NOT FORGET HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL!

SAY 'NO' GRACIOUSLY**1. Listen to the request**

Just listening softens the situation. An immediate 'no' can spark a negative reaction.

2. Say 'NO' graciously

No is a short word and can sound blunt. In a polite and firm tone, say 'no' along these lines, but adapt them to your style:

Work:

"I'm sorry; I can't help out at the moment..."

"I hope you'll understand that to go ahead with this right now is difficult..."

Socially:

"Normally I'd like to go along with that arrangement, but please excuse me".

3. Give reason(s)

Factual, time related reasons carry the most weight, especially in the workplace. These are often the reasons why you choose to say 'no' in the first place.

In a social and family context these may be some grey areas e.g. personal likes and dislikes. When giving your reasons here, bear in mind the philosophy.

"Tell the truth in such a way that it causes the least damage".

4. Offer alternative(s)

Despite saying 'no', you are showing that you still want to help, by offering alternatives. Sometimes these alternatives offer a better solution.

In practice it may look something like this:

No Mr Smith, sorry I cannot put you through to the company CEO directly from reception. What I can do is to put you through to his secretary, Ms Campbell. She is the best person to assist you with your query.

5 Personality & Social Styles

Personality begins where comparison ends

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER

Write down the answer to the following questions:

- Who is my customer?
- What makes them happy?

The SPECIAL Model

Make every customer feel SPECIAL

Speed and time

Personal / personalise

Expectations (manage and exceed)

Competence / courtesy

Information

Attitude

Long-term relationship

An advertisement for SKF. It features a woman with long dark hair smiling in the foreground. In the background, a large white wind turbine is visible against a blue sky. The text 'Brain power' is written in large white letters on the left. On the right, there is a block of text about wind energy and SKF's role. At the bottom left, there is a call to action to visit the SKF website. The SKF logo is in the bottom right corner.

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The COMPLAINER

The SLACKER

The KNOW-IT-ALL

The BULLY

Social Styles:

Instruction:

Jot down the answer, which describes your behaviour accurately. There are no right answers to these questions, so base your response on how you are today, not how you think you should be or would like to be in the future.

1. When talking to a customer or co-worker...

- a) I maintain eye contact the whole time.
- b) I alternate between looking at the person and looking down.
- c) I look around the room a good deal of the time.
- d) I try to maintain eye contact but look away from time to time.

2. I have an important decision to make...

- a) I think it through completely before deciding.
- b) I go with my gut instincts.
- c) I consider the impact it will have on other people before deciding.
- d) I run it by someone whose opinion I respect before deciding.

3. My office or work area mostly has...

- a) Family photos and sentimental items displayed.
- b) Inspirational posters, awards, and art displayed.
- c) Graphs and charts displayed.
- d) Calendars and project outlines displayed.

4. If I am having a conflict with a co-worker or customer...

- a) I try to help the situation along by focusing on the positive.
- b) I stay calm and try to understand the cause of the conflict.
- c) I try to avoid discussing the issue causing the conflict.
- d) I confront it right away so that it can get resolved as soon as possible.

5. When I talk on the phone at work...

- a) I keep the conversation focused on the purpose of the call.
- b) I spend a few minutes chatting before I get down to business.
- c) I am in no hurry to get off the phone and don't mind chatting about personal things, the weather, and so on.
- d) I try to keep the conversation as brief as possible.

6. If a co-worker is upset...

- a) I ask if I can do anything to help.
- b) I leave him alone because I do not want to intrude on his privacy.
- c) I try to cheer him up and help him to see the bright side.
- d) I feel uncomfortable and hope he gets over it soon.

7. When I attend meetings at work...

- a) I sit back and think about what is being said before offering my opinion.
- b) I put all my cards on the table so my opinion is well known.
- c) I express my opinion enthusiastically, but listen to other's ideas as well.
- d) I try to support the ideas of the other people in the meeting.

8. When I make a presentation in front of a group...

- a) I am entertaining and often humorous.
- b) I am clear and concise.
- c) I speak relatively quietly.
- d) I am direct, specific, and sometimes loud.

9. When a customer is explaining a problem to me...

- a) I try to understand and empathise with how he is feeling.
- b) I look for specific facts pertaining to the situation.
- c) I listen carefully for the main issue so that I can find a solution.
- d) I use my body language and tone of voice to show them I understand.

10. When I attend training programmes or presentations...

- a) Get bored if the person moves too slowly.
- b) I try to be supportive of the speaker, knowing how hard the job is.
- c) I want it to be entertaining as well as informative.
- d) I look for the logic behind what the speaker is saying.

11. When I want to get my point across to customers or co-workers...

- a) I listen to their point of view first and then express my ideas gently.
- b) I strongly state my opinion so that they know where I stand.
- c) I try to persuade them without being too forceful.
- d) I explain the thinking and logic behind what I am saying.

12. When I am late for a meeting or appointment...

- a) I don't panic but call ahead to say that I will be a few minutes late.
- b) I feel bad about keeping the other person waiting.
- c) I get very upset and rush there as soon as possible.
- d) I apologise profusely once I arrive.

13. I set goals and objectives at work that...

- a) I think that I can realistically attain.
- b) I feel are challenging and would be exciting to achieve.
- c) I need to achieve as part of a bigger objective.
- d) Will make me feel good when I achieve them.



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14. When explaining a problem to a co-worker whom I need help from...

- a) I explain the problem in as much detail as possible.
- b) I sometimes exaggerate to make my point.
- c) I try to explain how the problem makes me feel.
- d) I explain how I like the problem to be solved.

15. If customers or co-workers are late for a meeting with me in my office...

- a) I keep myself busy by making phone calls or working until they arrive.
- b) I assume they were delayed a bit and do not get upset.
- c) I call to make sure that I have the correct information (date, time, and so on)
- d) I get upset that the person is wasting my time.

16. When I am behind on a project and feel pressured to get it done...

- a) I make a list of everything I need to do, in what order, by when.
- b) I block out everything else and focus 100% on the work I need to do.
- c) I become anxious and have a hard time focusing on my work.
- d) I set a date to get the project done by and go for it.

17. When I feel verbally attacked by a customer or co-worker...

- a) I tell her to stop it.
- b) I feel hurt but usually don't say anything about it to her.
- c) I ignore her anger and try to focus on the facts of the situation.
- d) I let her know in strong terms that I don't like her behaviour.

18. When I see a co-worker or customer I like and haven't seen recently...

- a) I give him a friendly hug.
- b) I greet him but don't shake his hand.
- c) I give him a firm but quick handshake.
- d) I give him an enthusiastic handshake that lasts a few moments.

Scoring the Questionnaire

Once you have finished the questionnaire, review the following scoring sheet. You will be scoring yourself on four specific working styles, they are:

- **Driver (DR)**
- **Expressive (EX)**
- **Amiable (AM)**
- **Analytical (AY)**

Total Analytical Score _____

Total Amiable Score _____

Total Expressive Score _____

Total Driver Score _____

PROFILE NAME	DRIVER	EXPRESSIVE	AMIABLE	ANALYTICAL
PROFILE SYMBOLS	LION	PEACOCK	DOVE	OWL
KEYWORD	Dominance, Results, Driven	Image, Fun, Enthusiasm	Steady, Supportive, Co-operative	Correct, Conscientious, Careful
QUESTIONS	What?	Who?	How?	Why?
DO	Get to the point Be specific Be logical Provide choices, options and recommend Stick to business Tell more, ask less Speak up for yourself When writing, keep it short Be on time Expect them to 'tell it like it is'	Allow time to socialise Be fun and fast paced Ask for their opinions Talk about 'ideas' Make decisions quickly When writing, keep it short and sweet Respond quickly Demonstrate high energy	Move casually and informally Be patient Show that you have considered others feelings Give them time to think Listen empathetically Prepare them for changes Show how specific points tie into the big picture	Be prepared Be specific Go into considerable detail Provide accurate factual evidence Give them space Give them time to make choices Get ready to listen to more information than you really wanted to know Follow up in writing
DON'T	Ramble Lose things Chit chat Make decisions for them Get off the track	Be impersonal Get too business-like Talk down to them	Answer questions for them Be abrupt and fast Threaten or demand Question their loyalty Expect them to cope well with hostility or disapproval	Be disorganised Force decisions Get emotional Be vague
PACE	Fast Decisive	Fast Spontaneous	Slow Easy	Slow Systematic
STRESS REACTION	Dictate Assert	Attack Be sarcastic	Submit Acquiesce	Withdraw Avoid
SELLING AN IDEA	Focus on how your way of doing things will help them have better control.	Focus on how your way of doing things will help them influence others.	Focus on how your way of doing things will help them keep their environment stable.	Focus on your track record. Prepare statistics and back up materials.
WANTS TO BE...	In charge	Admired	Liked	Correct
IRRITATED BY...	Inefficiency Indecision	Boredom Routine	Insensitivity Impatience	Surprises Unpredictability

Analytical style is less assertive or “ask assertive” and tends to control emotions. This style is restrained in communication. The voice is often subdued, frequently monotone. The focus is on tasks. They have great interest for, and appreciation of, facts and data. The analytical style is reserved in the pace of speech, speaking more slowly and offering fewer statements. Their body language is more controlled and reserved. They may “clam up” with those who are overly aggressive or emotional.

Driving style is more assertive or “tell assertive” and tends to control emotions but tends to make more statements. They speak fast and are very direct. Though they don’t often use a wide range of vocal tone or inflection, they often speak louder than those of other styles. The driving style tends to focus on results and outcomes. They may become impatient with those who take too long to make decisions or those who are overly emotional.

Amiable style is less assertive, “ask assertive” and tends to display emotions. They speak more slowly and thoughtfully, use variety in their vocal tone, and they’re very sensitive to the needs or reactions of others. The amiable style is the most concerned with relationships and can become upset if there is discord in the office. They can lose sight of practicality if overwhelmed with emotional issues or relationship problems.



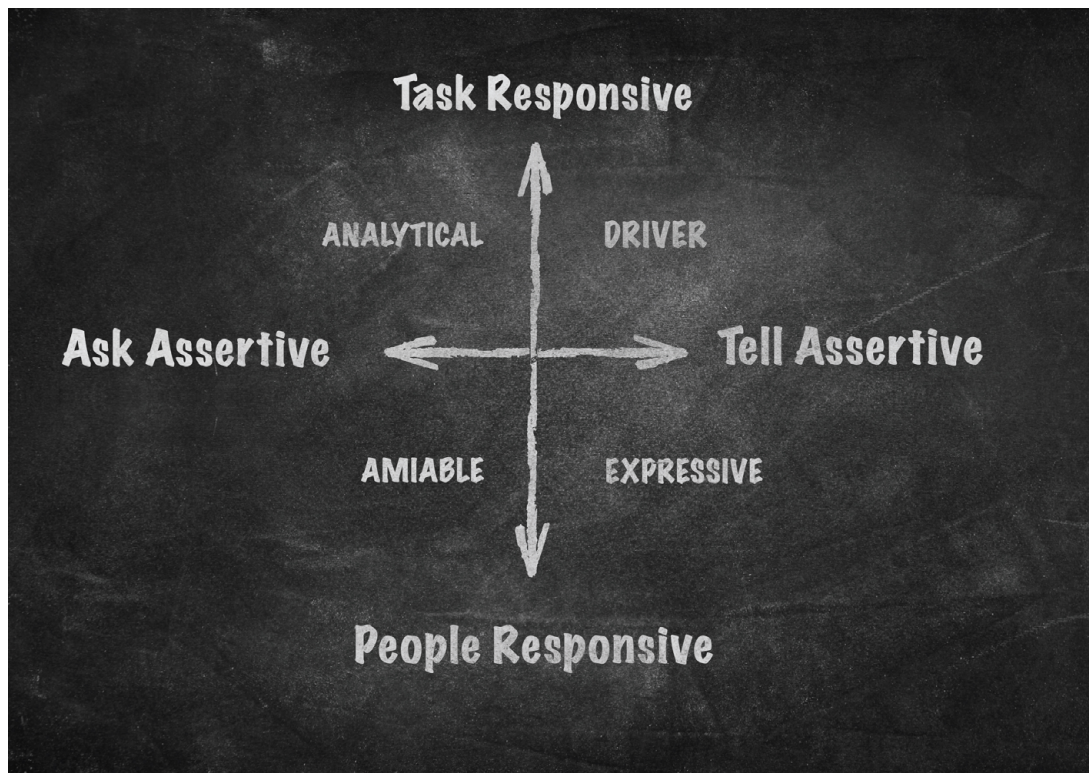
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Expressive style is 'tell assertive' and tends to display emotions. Individuals of the expressive behavioural type tend to make more statements. They speak faster, use more variety in their vocal tone, and they're frequently very animated in conversation. The expressive style tends to focus on issues with people, and they often use stories in making their points. They are often highly spontaneous and can generate high energy and creative ideas for the practice. Follow through, however, can be a challenge for these folks.

The two Social Style scales revealed that by combining the two dimensions, Assertiveness and Responsiveness, four patterns of behaviour, or "Social Styles", can be identified.

Driving: (Tell Assertive + Control Responsive)

These individuals are seen as strong willed and more emotionally controlled.

Expressive: (Tell Assertive + Emote Responsive)

These individuals are described as outgoing and more dramatic.

Amiable: (Ask Assertive + Emote Responsive)

These individuals are seen as easy going and supportive.

Analytical: (Ask Assertive + Control Responsive)

These individuals are described as serious and more exacting.

The Bottom Line

Once you have understood your Social Style try and interpret your Customer's Social Style. Then COPY their style. In NLP language this is called 'mirroring'. People with similar Social Styles feel comfortable with each other. So the bottom line is, fake it until you make it!

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6 Body Language & Image

The body never lies
(adapted from Martha Graham)

BODY LANGUAGE

Body language is a nonverbal flow of communication that is constant and ever present. Without saying a word your body language can reveal what you are thinking and feeling.



At the front desk of your company you communicate to everyone that comes into your company or who comes to your desk through your body language. You could give a few messages, e.g.:

- I am tired.
- I am bored.
- Go away I don't want to talk to you.
- Hi, it's so nice to see you. Welcome, how may I assist you?

It is the last bullet point that we want to communicate to all who come to our desks or company.

When we communicate with someone face-to-face there are three areas of communication that come into play. These three are the words that I say, the tone of my voice and my body language.

One often has to ask you: "How do people perceive me? How do they visualise me based on the way that I speak, sound or with what I say?"

Here are some practical ideas for you to use when you are at your desk...

Don't cross your arms or legs

You have probably already heard you shouldn't cross your arms as it might make you seem closed, defensive or guarded. This may not always be true as it may be cold, you may find crossing your arms comfortable. Be careful not to cross your legs at the same time as this forms a cluster, which will convey the message of defensive, closed or guarded. This goes for your legs too. Keep your arms and legs relaxed but not crossed.

Have eye contact with customers, but don't stare

If there are several people you are talking to, give them all some eye contact to create a better connection and see if they are listening. Keeping too much eye contact might creep people out. Giving no eye contact might make you seem insecure. If you are not used to keeping eye contact it might feel a little hard or scary in the beginning but keep working on it and you'll get used to it.

Nod when they are talking

Nod once in a while to signal that you are listening. This indicates to a customer that you are paying attention to what they are saying. But don't overdo it and peck like Woody Woodpecker. Make sure that your nodding is positive (up and down) and not negative (side to side).

Don't slouch, sit up straight

Sit in a relaxed but professional manner, not in too tense a manner. Look prepared to assist the next customer. To do this try not to turn your back to the front door for long periods, you need to see who is coming in and going out.

Lean forward, but not too much

If you want to show that you are interested in what someone is saying, lean toward the person talking. If you want to show that you're confident in yourself and relaxed lean back a bit. But don't lean in too much or you might seem needy and desperate for some approval. Or lean back too much or you might seem arrogant and distant.

Smile and laugh

Lighten up; don't take yourself or life too seriously. Relax a bit, smile and laugh when someone says something funny. People will be a lot more inclined to listen to you if you seem to be a positive person. But don't be the first to laugh at your own jokes, it may make you seem nervous and needy. Smile when you are introduced to someone but don't keep a smile plastered on your face, you'll seem insincere. Always remember that your facial expression should go with what is being said.

Don't touch your face

It might make you seem nervous and can be distracting for the listeners or the people in the conversation.

Slow down a bit

This goes for many things. Walking slower not only makes you seem calmer and confident, it will also make you feel less stressed. If someone addresses you, don't snap your neck in his or her direction; turn it a bit more slowly instead.

Don't fidget

Try to avoid, phase out or transform fidgety movement and nervous ticks such as shaking your leg or tapping your fingers against the table rapidly. You'll seem nervous and fidgeting can be distracting when you are trying to get something across. De-clutter your movements if you are all over the place. Try to relax, slow down and focus your movements.

Use your hands more confidently

Instead of fidgeting with your hands and scratching your face use them to communicate what you are trying to say. Use your hands to describe something or to add weight to a point you are trying to make. But don't use them too much or it might become distracting and don't let your hands flail around, use them with some control. The best way to use hands when explaining is to do it palms-up. This comes across as non-threatening.



7 Is Your Receptionist A Top Performer?

You only get ONE CHANCE to make a FIRST impression!

Who builds your brand day in day out?

Receptionists are often taken for granted when ideally they should be kept informed, superbly trained, motivated and incentivized to provide great service. For most of the day the receptionist is on display, often lowly paid and undervalued on by many on the fast track.

They often play an overlooked role in the creation of a brand experience. Too many businesses assume that they can market themselves successfully without a properly trained receptionist. Millions are spent on brand and advertising, but nobody knows the name of the living embodiment of the brand – the receptionist. The receptionist is literally the figure at the forefront of the company. Curious or discontent customers don't pose their questions or air their grievances to management, but to the receptionist.



"I studied English for 16 years but...
...I finally learned to speak it in just six lessons"

Jane, Chinese architect

ENGLISH OUT THERE

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While our lives are supposedly made easier by ever-increasing technology, the fact remains we are usually relieved to hear a competent-sounding human voice at the end of the line – particularly when we don't really know which of those dreadful press-button options applies to our specific problem. For this reason, it is profoundly important that your receptionist is carefully chosen and fully trained to deal with the public.

Few business owners understand that their company's reputation rests on the first impression gained by customers or prospects. How that first call is handled is all-important in creating the right perception in your customers' minds. Not enough business owners invest time or money in helping their frontline staff gain the necessary skills, such as how to handle angry customers, deal with complaints, be assertive and promote the brand.

Have you spent a lot of money building your brand, and promoting its promise through advertising and social media channels? Have you involved your frontline staff – yes, including your receptionist – in the branding process? How can they be expected to live the brand if you don't give them the opportunity to offer their ideas and input?

Competencies to look for...

What competencies do you look for in a good receptionist? Top of the list should be the ability to establish a rapport by being warm, friendly and courteous. They must be able to actively listen and put the customer first; ask questions to show the customer they understand their needs; problem solve; under promise and over deliver; and act on requests made. In addition, the ability to handle conflict and deal with angry customers are vital skills. These are the skills set we expect from Senior Managers and we train them to be proficient, so why not train your receptionist?

Rate Your Receptionist's Skills

Rate your receptionist's skills by filling in the number that applies to them below.

1 = NEVER

6 = ALWAYS

1. He/she absorbs customer frustration and emotion, without taking it personally, remaining in empathy/solution mode.
2. Takes an interest in the customer and their needs.
3. Uses customer names appropriately in conversations and discussions.
4. Takes care to get spelling and pronunciation correct.
5. Transfers calls warmly, when appropriate.
6. Keeps visitors/callers informed if there is a delay.

7. Says goodbye to customers cheerfully at end of visit/phone call.
8. Coordinates people effectively (e.g. couriers with packages; meeting rooms)
9. Spots and acts i.e. takes ownership of issues, even if the issue belongs to someone else/
uses initiative

(Adapted from B Edwards)

How did your receptionist do? Did these questions make you stop and think about how your customers are currently being handled? They should if you didn't manage to reach top marks.

Interview carefully

When you recruit for a management position, you probably spend days interviewing candidates in order to assess their potential. How thorough are you when it comes to appointing a receptionist?

We conducted 'mystery calls' on receptionists and our research shows that:

- 40% didn't know their bosses name
- 80% didn't know their brand promise
- 70% were not friendly
- 85% were not willing to take a message voluntarily.

Can you blame the receptionist? No. If you look at their skills base, their exposure to training, in some companies, often borders on zero.

Take a good look at your receptionist and ask yourself.

'How much quality time is given to the person who is actually the voice of your company?'

They sit at the frontline of your contact with customers, and actually represent your BRAND.

Our clients often tell us, sometimes with indignation, that their customers 'lack loyalty'. This should not come as a surprise to them: as M.B. Jackson writes, "Today's customers have all the knowledge, options, choices & the power. What they don't have is loyalty".

As the old saying goes, "It takes years to win over a customer and just seconds to lose one" so do take care and nurture your receptionist, otherwise however good your product or service is, a disgruntled or badly trained receptionist could undo all the good work.

The CEO of one of our clients said, “The Receptionist is the most important person in my organization. The next call or visitor could be a new client ready to put \$1 million of business our way. And this decision depends on how they are treated right from the start”.

How Right He Is! Remember – *People Buy from People they like!*

RECEPTION DO's AND DON'Ts

Welcome every visitor with a smile

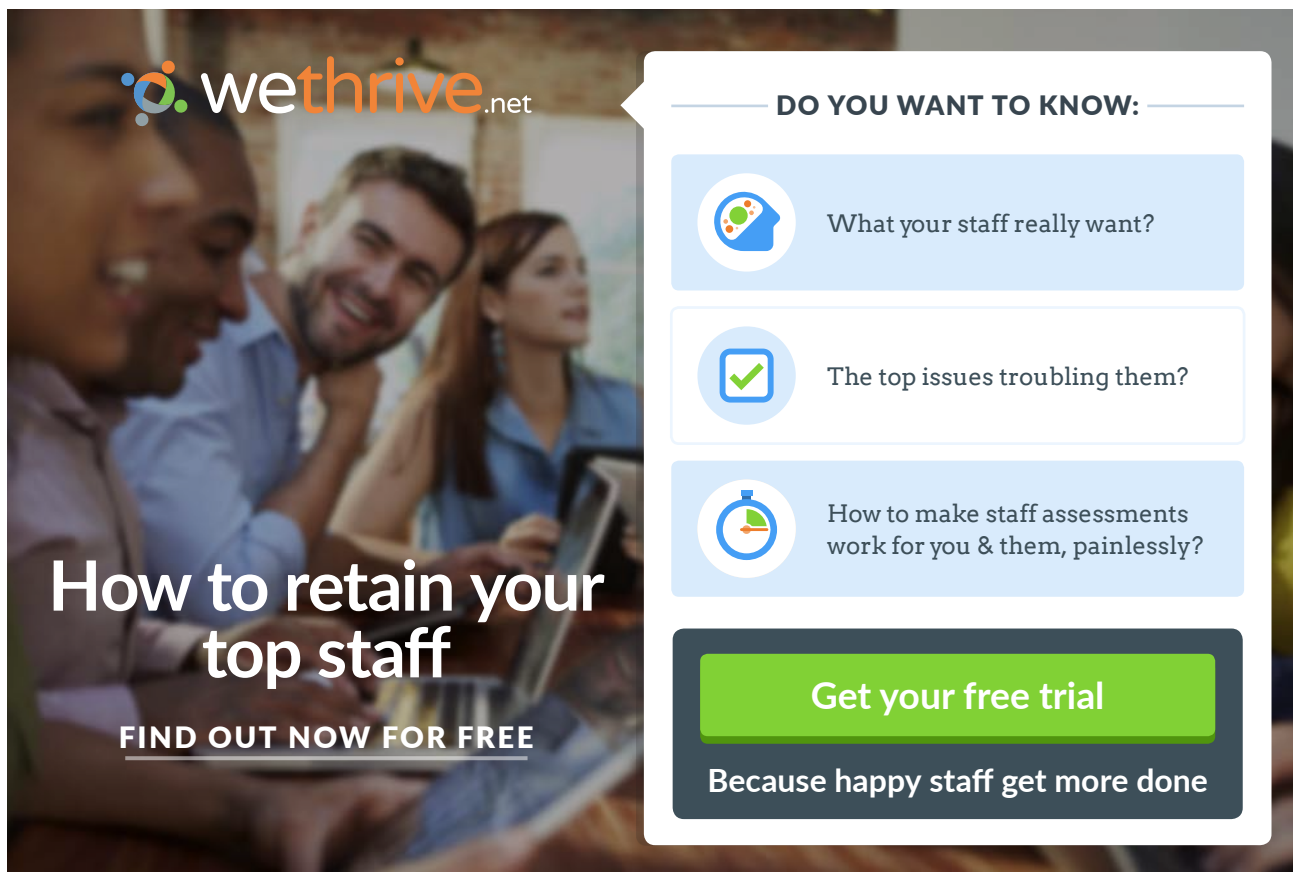
A picture paints a thousand words and your body language is very critical. Therefore you need to take the time to speak clearly, slowly and in a cheerful and professional way while greeting every visitor.

Use your normal tone of voice when greeting a visitor

If you have a tendency to speak loud or shout, avoid doing so while greeting the visitor.

Address the visitor properly by his or her title

Never address an unfamiliar visitor by his or her first name.



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Do not use poor language

Respond clearly with 'yes' or 'no' when speaking. NEVER swear.

Listen to the visitor and what they have to say

The ability to listen is a problem in general but it is very important to listen to what the visitor has to say. It is always a good habit to repeat the information back to the client when you are taking a message to verify that you have heard and transcribed the message accurately.

Do not eat or drink while you are at the desk

Only eat or drink during your coffee break or lunch break at the designated cafeteria.

Be patient and helpful

If a visitor is irate or upset, listen to what they have to say and then refer them to the appropriate resource. Never snap back or act rude to the visitor.

Always ask if the visitor has time to wait

If you are responsible for handling multiple visitors at once, always ask the visitor politely if you have to make them wait. Remember that the visitor could have waited several minutes in the queue before reaching you. Once the visitor agrees to wait, follow up with them regularly to ensure the waiting time isn't long.

Always focus on the visitor

Try not to get distracted by the people around you. If someone tries to interrupt you while you are attending to the visitor, politely remind him or her that you are attending to the visitor and you will be with him or her as soon as you have finished.

Assist visitors while filling out visitor passes

If your company has a detailed procedure for filling up visitor passes, assist the visitor in the process. It is not advisable to make the visitor spend a lot of time at the front desk filling up the pass, while time can be utilised by the visitor in a constructive business meeting.

8 Excellent Telephone Skills

When love and skill work together, expect a masterpiece

John Ruskin

By the end of this chapter you will:

- Know how first impressions are created
- Understand it's not what you say, it how you say it; voice, tone and body language
- Use positive language to create the right impression and manage expectations



WHY IS IMAGE IMPORTANT IN THE WORKPLACE?

Our business can be identified by our address, our buildings, our products and our logo. Every business strives to maintain a winning, professional **identity**. Remember you never have a second chance to create a good first impression.

Our **image** is made up of the behaviour, performance and appearance of the people in our business. Personal grooming has a big impact on your customers. Dirty hands and fingernails, messy hair, and body odour are items that add to the makeup and image of you and your company. Our customers expect us to look appropriate to the job we do.

The neatness is also important to the customers who have access to it. Customers make a decision of whether they want to do business with you and your company based on the way your desk and work area looks. What people evaluate your company and the people in it on, are:

1. First Impressions

- Appearance and body language
- Voice Quality
 - *Pitch*
 - *Speed*
 - *Accent*
 - *Tone*
- Words

2. Impact On People You Meet

- Physical Appearance and Body Language
- Voice Quality
- Words

3. The Five Cs of a Winning Corporate Image

- Competence
- Credibility
- Control
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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Perception is based entirely on the how, not the what.

Your values and intentions don't matter – it's what others believe that counts!

Did you know that appearance & body language are 55% of the first impression perceived, followed by 38% vocal quality and 7% verbal content!

It matters because other people's perceptions determine whether they trust you, believe you or take your lead.

POSITIVE TELESRIPTING

Are you still using outdated, negative phrases such as "I'm sorry, she's not available", "I'm afraid he's in a meeting" or "I don't know, they didn't tell me"? If you are, you are damaging rather than enhancing the image of your organisation. We can easily turn negatives into positives and amateurs into professionals, with the turn of a phrase.

Your caller would like to know when he could speak to somebody and what can be done in the meantime, rather than he can't speak to anybody now and there is nothing that can be done to assist him. So, practice using positive words like 'can', 'will' and 'shall' in place of negative words like 'can't', 'not' and 'I don't know'.

We inspire confidence in our callers when we respond positively using action words. It is important to tell people what we **can** do for them instead of what we **can't** do. Practice rewriting these negative responses and turn them into confidence-inspiring action statements.

- Sorry I can't help you with that...
- Unfortunately, he is in a meeting at the moment...
- Linda has already gone home, it's her half day...
- Mike has got somebody with him in his office...
- I'm afraid; Mary is not answering her phone...
- Gayle's on lunch and I don't know when she'll be back...
- I can't tell you how long it will be...
- Sorry to keep you waiting, it's so hectic here!

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9 Doing & Saying The Right Thing: The Importance Of Telephone Etiquette

There is no accomplishment so easy to acquire as politeness, and none more profitable
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

By the end of this module you will know how to:



- Put callers on hold
- Transfer calls
- Deal with visitors
- Take messages

TELEPHONE ETIQUETTE

You may not have a lifeline...or phone a friend...or even take two wrong answers away...but you will enjoy taking this fun, simple quiz on customer service.

As we all know, it's not rocket science, and of course, most of it is all common sense as they say. However, we all know too that common sense is NOT that common.

So have fun, enjoy the quiz...and good luck!

1. **"How can I help you?" belongs:**
 - a) In the initial greeting.
 - b) In the message taking scenario.
 - c) Nowhere. I'm not able to help anyone.

2. **When I'm not able to help a customer, I should:**
 - a) Tell them honestly and thank them for their business and hang up.
 - b) Give whatever information I can, right or wrong. Wrong information is better than no information.
 - c) Get help immediately and advise the person help is on the way.
3. **When I'm having a bad day, I should:**
 - a) Not bother coming into work
 - b) Leave my troubles at the doorstep like the song says.
 - c) Tell all my co-workers my troubles to get it off my back.
4. **Chewing gum at work is:**
 - a) OK.
 - b) A bad breath refresher.
 - c) Downright rude and obnoxious. FAGETABOUTIT!
5. **A mirror at my desk will:**
 - a) Keep my ego in check.
 - b) Remind me to smile BEFORE I pick up the phone.
 - c) Give me bad luck if it breaks.
6. **Basic customer service skills are important to me because:**
 - a) Everyone needs a refresher.
 - b) I need a lot of help.
 - c) I never learned any.
7. **Internal customer service means:**
 - a) Be nice to others who come into my office.
 - b) The customer is giving me a stomach-ache.
 - c) Treating my co-workers as customers.
8. **When using voice mail and leaving a message I should:**
 - a) Leave my phone number twice and slowly.
 - b) Leave a good clean joke to keep them smiling.
 - c) Not leave a message...just call back till I reach them.
9. **Irate callers/customers are important to our company because:**
 - a) It's fun to handle those kinds of calls.
 - b) At least we get a second chance to make it right.
 - c) I finally get to yell back.

10. Asking questions of the customer will:

- a) Aggravate them.
- b) Show I'm interested in helping.
- c) Be considered being too nosy.

QUIZ ANSWERS

- 1. **Correct answer is A.** Anything after your name...erases your name. And on initial greetings, your name is very important. You have answered the phone to help them. It's a given. Those words are best used in a message-taking scenario. Research show that one should greet, identify your company, tell them who they are speaking to and ask how you may assist/help them, e.g. *"Good day, this is Company Name, You are speaking with Mary. How may I help you?"*
- 2. **Correct answer is C.** Be sure you let the customer know that help is on the way. That's the most important part.
- 3. **Correct answer is B.** We need to leave our troubles at the door. Arguments with a spouse or a bad hair day are your problem. Telephone Doctor calls that 'emotional leakage'. That's getting angry at Peter and taking it out on Paul. Not fair, not right, and no fun.
- 4. **Correct answer is C.** No gum at work – ever. End of subject. If you have bad breath – use mouthwash.



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5. **Correct answer is B.** The old Telephone Doctor adage...‘smile BEFORE you pick up the phone’ is the way to make every phone call, or customer contact, a great one. Remember, it’s hard to be rude when you’re smiling.
6. **Correct answer is A.** Everyone can use a brush up course. There’s a great saying; “When you’re through learning...you’re through”. Never stop taking those little basic skill lessons you’re offered. Even if you do know it all...look how good you’ll feel about that!
7. **Correct answer is C.** We need to treat our co-workers as well as we’re going to treat our external customers. Remember: We Are Customers To Each Other. We sure don’t need any internal conflicts between co-workers and departments.
8. **Correct answer is A.** Voice mail was meant to take an effective message. Give details and speak conversationally so the person receiving the message will enjoy it. Effective messages have concrete information – dates, times, names, situations. Leave your phone number – twice and slowly. Make voice mail work for you...not against you.
9. **Correct answer is B.** Getting a second chance is golden. And irate callers, while certainly not pleasant, can be the challenge of the day. And they can be satisfied.
10. **Correct answer is B.** Listening and questioning skills are very important to excellent customer service.

TELEPHONE STANDARDS

Every time you lift your receiver you are projecting the image of your company. You are the front window of your company. The caller has expectations, which have been created by your corporate identity in the marketplace. Do you meet these expectations?

Confidence comes from knowing that you are doing the right things right. On the telephone **you never get a second chance to make a first impression!** – You must do it right the first time.

GREETING

Use three phrases when you answer a telephone. Here is an example of a successful greeting:

“Good day, (company/department), you are speaking to Belinda”

In this instance you have a greeting and an identity.

Never say “Hello” when you answer a business call. It does not dignify your position. The reason we start with “Good morning/good afternoon” and not your name, is because it’s fine for the caller to miss our greeting but he must hear your name.

ESTABLISHING THE CALLER'S IDENTITY

It is important to establish right at the beginning of the call who you are speaking to. When you have your caller's name use it as often as possible during the conversation. Every person enjoys the sound of their own name, and if that's what it takes to make our customers feel special, we'll do it with pleasure.

Instead of asking "Who are you?" or "What is your name?" try some more professional phrases like:

- **"I'm sure that I can help you, to whom am I speaking?"**
- **"Certainly, and I'm speaking to?"**
- **"Absolutely, and who may I say is calling?"**

DEALING WITH A CALL ON HOLD

As we have all been 'put on hold' before, we can understand that not many people enjoy this, but it is a necessary telephone function. We can make this more pleasant for our caller by using positive and professional phrases such as:

- **"Would you mind waiting for me please Mrs X while I..."**
- **"One moment please, while I find out for you..."**

When we take our caller back off hold, let him know that we are aware of his patience by saying:

- **"Thank you for your patience Mr Smith"**
- **Thank you for waiting Jenny"**

TAKING NOTES

Always have a pen and paper handy – and use it. A professional telephone user writes down names, addresses, telephone numbers and important information. The caller feels more confident if they know that you are writing down their message. When they start to say "My name is...", interrupt and take control of the call. This is simple. You could say:

"Mr Jones, I would like to write down your information, may I have your address please. Your telephone number please. When can Mr Johnson return your call?"

By doing this, you instil two-fold confidence: the caller knows that you are efficient and he trusts that the message will reach its destination.

LISTENING AND REFLECTING

Your caller must know that you are listening attentively to him. The only way he will know this, is if you use appropriate listening responses. We call these echoing and reflecting. Echo the important statements that your caller makes and reflect the obvious emotion that he is feeling. For instance, if a customer rings to say that his purchase has not been delivered as promised, you will undoubtedly detect an angry or annoyed tone in his voice.

You could reply to his statement (without interrupting him) by saying:

- “It sounds as though you are very disappointed...”
- “I can imagine how frustrated you must feel...”

A safe phrase to use, which shows empathy in all difficult situations, is:

“I can hear that you are annoyed Mr Smith”

When your caller makes an important statement or leaves an important message with you, demonstrate that you are listening by echoing the very words that he has spoken. For instance:

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“You requested the document to be delivered yesterday and you would like me to ask the Division Manager to let you know why this has not been done. You will be at 785-5555 until 16 00 hrs today”

THE WARM TRANSFER PROCESS

Step One:

Inform the customer of who you are transferring the call to and why!

e.g. “Mrs X, let me transfer you to John, our second level support technician. He is able to assist you with your query. Would you mind waiting while I get him on the line for you?”

Step Two: Pass the customer details onto your colleague

e.g. “John, I have Mrs X on the line. Her user ID number is 456, and she requires assistance with... Could you please assist her further?”

Step Three: Connect the customer and your colleague

e.g. “Thank you for your patience Mrs X, I have John on the line for you. I have explained the problem to him. He is able to assist you further.”

ENDING THE CALL

Your last impression is the lasting impression. Always check if your caller needs anything else from you, and then say:

- **“Is there anything else I can assist you with?”**
- **“Thank you for calling Miss Coetzee”**
- **“I am glad we had this conversation, Mr Jones will ring you later”**
- **“I am please I could be of service to you, Mr Merriweather”**
- **“Have a good day and thank you for calling”**

10 Dealing With Difficult People & Situations

Knowing your own darkness is the best way of dealing with the darkneses of other people.
CARL JUNG

By the end of this chapter you will be able to:

- Deal with manipulation, criticism and complaints
- Learn to say 'no' assertively
- Ask the right questions
- Listen actively



ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS – THE KEY TO GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

The following questions will be helpful in assessing your assertiveness. Be totally honest with your responses.

Instructions

Choose and make a note of the number that describes you best for the following questions:

1. Practically, always, entirely
2. Usually or a great deal
3. Average
4. Somewhat or sometimes
5. Not at all or never

1. When a person is extremely unfair, do you call it to their attention?	1 2 3 4 5
2. Do you usually lack confidence in your own judgement?	1 2 3 4 5
3. Are you frequently openly critical of others' ideas, opinions or behaviour?	1 2 3 4 5
4. Do you speak out in protest when someone pushes in front of you in a queue?	1 2 3 4 5
5. Do you avoid some situations or people for fear of embarrassment?	1 2 3 4 5
6. Are you prone to lose your temper?	1 2 3 4 5
7. Do you insist that your spouse or roommate take on a fair share of household chores?	1 2 3 4 5
8. Do you find it hard to say No to a salesman even though the merchandise is not really what you want?	1 2 3 4 5
9. At family meals, do you control the conversation?	1 2 3 4 5
10. If a person has borrowed something and is overdue in returning it, do you mention it?	1 2 3 4 5
11. Are you reluctant to speak up in a discussion or debate?	1 2 3 4 5
12. Do you continue to pursue an argument after the other person has had enough?	1 2 3 4 5
13. Do you generally express how you feel?	1 2 3 4 5
14. Are you disturbed if someone watches you working?	1 2 3 4 5
15. Do you finish other people's sentences for them?	1 2 3 4 5
16. If someone keeps kicking or bumping your chair in a movie or lecture, do you ask the person to stop?	1 2 3 4 5
17. Do you try to be a wallflower or a piece of furniture at social gatherings?	1 2 3 4 5

18. Do you show anger by name-calling or obscenities?	1 2 3 4 5
19. When you discover that merchandise you have bought is faulty, do you return it for replacement?	1 2 3 4 5
20. In a restaurant when the meal is improperly prepared, do you find it difficult to ask the waiter to correct the situation?	1 2 3 4 5
21. Do you often step in and make decisions for others?	1 2 3 4 5
22. Are you able to openly express love and affection?	1 2 3 4 5
23. Do you find it difficult to ask your friends for small favours or help?	1 2 3 4 5
24. Do you always think you have the right answers?	1 2 3 4 5
25. When you differ with a person you respect, are you able to speak up for your own viewpoint?	1 2 3 4 5
26. Do you have difficulty complimenting or praising others?	1 2 3 4 5
27. Do you shout or use bullying tactics to get others to do as you wish?	1 2 3 4 5
28. Are you able to refuse unreasonable requests made by friends?	1 2 3 4 5
29. Do you find it difficult to keep eye contact when talking to another person?	1 2 3 4 5
30. Do you get into physical fights with others?	1 2 3 4 5

a) Add up the scores for questions: 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28

b) Add up the scores for questions: 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29

c) Add up the scores for questions: 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30

d) Subtract the total score in **b)** from the total score in **a)**

a) Represents your assertive behaviour

b) Represents your non-assertive behaviour

d) Represents your overall assertiveness score

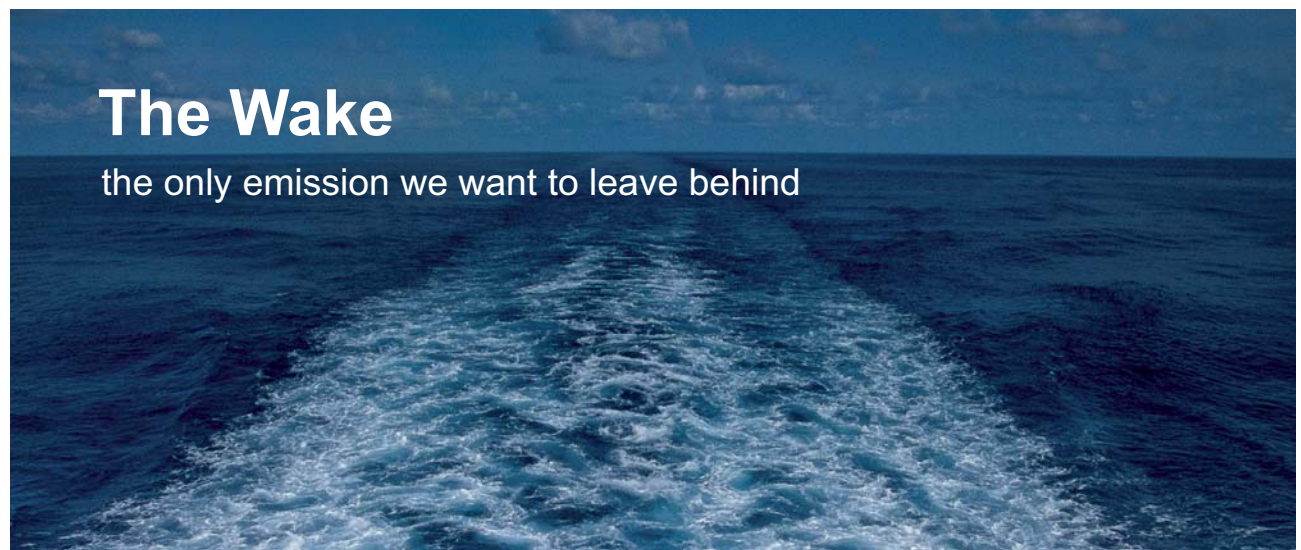
- A score less than 0 indicates that you are low in assertiveness
- A score of 0–15 indicates you are somewhat assertive
- A score of 15–30 indicates you are usually assertive
- A score of over 30 indicates you are very assertive

c) Is your aggression score

- A score of 10–20 indicates that you are low in aggression
- A score of 20–30 indicates that you are somewhat aggressive
- A score of 30–40 indicates that you are usually aggressive
- A score of over 40 indicates you are very aggressive

WHAT IS ASSERTIVENESS?

If you don't know how to get that delicate balance between being straightforward and tact, you could be creating conflict between yourself and others. You then lose your cool and become aggressive to anyone who comes in sight. This forces your co-workers to become defensive on their own with the result that they find it difficult listening to you.




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The opposite is also true: if you are too tentative when putting your point forward your co-workers might not take you seriously. When we stand up for and defend our rights without violating the rights of others, then we are being assertive. We are striving for open and honest communication, where we can express our feelings, opinions and thoughts in a non-threatening and balanced way – not manipulation! We are looking for ‘win-win’ discussions.

When we are able to use assertive skills, it will help us to:

- **Be respectful of self and others**
- **Lead to better, and more controlled feelings**
- **Be more independent, and responsible**
- **Communicate our feelings, ideas, and needs**

BROKEN RECORD (Maintaining focus)

A skill, that by calm repetition – saying what we want over and over again – teaches persistence without our having to rehearse arguments or angry feelings beforehand. This still allows us to feel comfortable when ignoring manipulative verbal side-traps, argumentative baiting, is irrelevant logic, while sticking to our point.

FOGGING (Taking criticism without necessarily agreeing)

A skill that teaches acceptance of manipulative criticism by calmly acknowledging to our critic the possibility that there may be some truth in what he is saying, yet allowing ourselves to remain our own judge of what to do.

NEGATIVE ENQUIRY (Asking for more information about our ‘faults’)

A skill that teaches the active prompting of criticism, in order to use the information (if helpful) or exhaust it (if manipulative) while prompting our critic to be more assertive and less dependent on manipulative tactics.

Allows us to comfortably seek out criticism about ourselves in close relationships, while prompting the other person to express honest negative feelings and improve communication.

“I-MESSAGE”

An “I-MESSAGE” is a way to tell another person about the problem you’re having with that person’s behaviour, without blaming them. It is an assertive step towards stating your legitimate rights.

Draw a grid like below and fill in the columns below with information about behaviour you need to discuss:

BEHAVIOUR	FEELINGS	EFFECT

HOW TO BECOME MORE ASSERTIVE

1. Change your statement from 'you' to 'I'

When you say: "You are making me angry!" it can sound aggressive. But "I'm starting to feel angry!" is assertive, and more accurate.

Remember, no one can make us feel angry. While events beyond our control do impact on us, we can still choose our response behaviour. We cannot pretend that feelings don't exist, but we can be more comfortable (and productive) sharing them assertively, not aggressively.

2. Try for short responses

We have a tendency to go on, and on, and on...until we have talked ourselves into either a passive or aggressive state of mind.

Give the other person time to respond. It is so much more effective. A moment's silence speaks volumes...

3. Slow down!

This means slowing down both our rate of speaking, and our body movements. We may feel upset, but this conscious effort will tend to calm our feelings.

4. Deepen your voice

When we raise our voice, we lower our argument. This literally means taking a deep breath and using that breath, speaking more softly, and of course, more deeply.

5. Review your non-verbal behaviour (body language)

Watch your stance. Place your feet firmly while standing, or sitting. And try to communicate at eye level. Also, how are you dressing? – for the job you have, or the job you want?

Is the way you dress inviting the kind of response you'd like from people?

6. Learn to say 'NO'

You can usually do this with a smart question: "Do you want me to leave my children on their own?" "Well, no..." "I'm glad you understand. Perhaps I can help you by...some other time..." (a workable compromise).



Be smart, and be honest

If you get an urgent job, ask the switchboard to hold calls. Or ask your manager to take the calls – it's in his interest that you complete an important task. Perhaps a colleague could take messages.

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HANDLING COMPLAINTS

In a way, complaints should be welcomed. Consider what frequently happens when a customer does not complain... They stop using the product, bad mouth you to colleagues and become open to competitors sales approach. They've decided that doing business with you is just not worth it, and have moved on to one of your competitors. But they are still telling other people about the bad experience they had with you.

Fortune Magazine estimates that up to 98% of all dissatisfied customers leave without saying why. That's a variable worth paying attention to! And it also underscores the real value of those customers who do take the time to complain to you, even if they are angry.

So, no complaint should be considered so minor as to be totally ignored. However you qualify a complaint, you must remember that to the customer, getting it resolved may be a key task in his/her day's plan of action.

Whether or not the customer remains loyal to your company and your product may depend on your ability to sympathetically deal with his complaint.

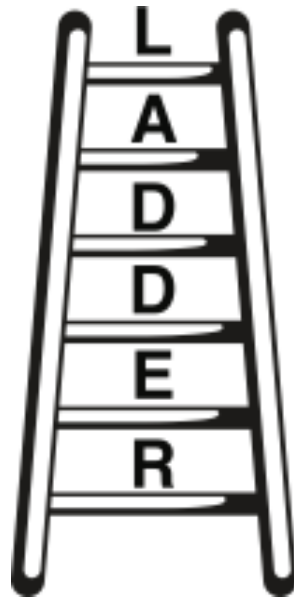
Types of Complaints

All complaints can be classified as 'justified' or 'unjustified'. However, these are terms which reflect your perspective: the customer's, regardless of the facts of the case, may be different and continue to reflect the 'rightness' of his/her complaint even after your innocence in the matter is no longer in dispute.

This notion underscores the two elements present in many complaints: the practical element (the problem, the facts and the repercussions) and the emotional element (which can cloud the realities of the situation).

Of the two elements in a complaint, it is the emotional element, which is frequently the driving force and, if not handled appropriately, can cause the most damage.

It is this point, which supports the following method of handling complaints. The technique can be easily remembered by the word.

LADDER.**LISTEN:**

Listen not just at the beginning but throughout. Let the customer express his/her emotions, however hurtful or 'unjustified' these are. Listen carefully and make notes on the strategic issues at the core of his complaint.

An advertisement for SKF. It features a woman with long dark hair smiling in the foreground. In the background, a wind turbine is visible against a blue sky. The text 'Brain power' is written in large white letters. To the right, there is a block of text about wind energy and SKF's role. At the bottom left, it says 'Plug into The Power of Knowledge Engineering. Visit us at www.skf.com/knowledge'. The SKF logo is in the bottom right corner.

Brain power

By 2020, wind could provide one-tenth of our planet's electricity needs. Already today, SKF's innovative know-how is crucial to running a large proportion of the world's wind turbines.

Up to 25 % of the generating costs relate to maintenance. These can be reduced dramatically thanks to our systems for on-line condition monitoring and automatic lubrication. We help make it more economical to create cleaner, cheaper energy out of thin air.

By sharing our experience, expertise, and creativity, industries can boost performance beyond expectations. Therefore we need the best employees who can meet this challenge!

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SKF

ASK FOR HIS OR HER NAME:

Get his as early on as possible, and also the customer's title, company and location of the complaint.

DETAILS:

Ask for the precise nature of the problem. Use the 5W's and an H to define the problem. Find out when it arose, who was involved, when it happened, where it happened, what happened, how it arose.

DEVELOPMENTS:

Get a complete run-down of the impact or repercussions of the problem. This is important. The customer may attribute lost revenue or costs to the problem and expect reimbursement from your company. You therefore need to know what liabilities you may be responsible for, before offering open promises of total resolution.

EXAMPLE:

Offer an example of what you can do to resolve the problem, hence answer the complaint. Wait for the customer's reaction. The example offered might not completely satisfy the customer, in which case he/she will most probably specify what he/she wants.

This will give you an opportunity to further probe for details of the complaints and determine to what extent the customer is seeking emotional satisfaction, as well as satisfaction of the strategic issue. On the other hand, your offer may entirely satisfy the customer.

RESOLUTION:

Summarise the discussion and confirm precisely what you intend to do.

Naturally, as an employee, you are its legal representative and anything you say or promise, must be backed up by your company. Therefore, if at any time you are not sure how to resolve a complaint or what liabilities you can accept on your company's behalf, tell your customer and seek your manager's opinion.

11 Questioning Skills

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.
ALBERT EINSTEIN

Research shows that giving information or ideas, arguments or opinions has a low impact on other people and rarely succeeds. It is difficult talking people into accepting your point of view. It is much more effective to ask questions which will result in them talking themselves into acceptance. It also shows that you are showing an understanding from the customer's point of view.

If you go to the doctor and you tell him “Aaah Doctor, I’ve got terrible stomach cramps”, he then opens his drawer and hands you a bottle of pills and then says “Okay let’s have a look at you and see what’s wrong”. What will you do?

You will never go back to that doctor because he obviously needs to make a diagnosis first before he can prescribe medicine...am I right?

The same principle applies when dealing with a prospective policy holder. You will not ramble off and tell them how great your product is before you make an accurate diagnosis on what the actual need or problem is will you?



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By using effective questioning techniques you can accurately diagnose what the underlying issue behind the issue is and then provide a practical solution based on your diagnosis.

Let's start with the basics

There are two main types of questions, they are:

Closed questions

This question normally forces a one word answer or a yes or no answer.

For example:

- “Are you satisfied with my answer?” or
- “Do you understand the principle of this product?” or
- “Do you want me to continue and sign you up?”

This type of question will normally be used when you want a specific yes or no answer.

Open-ended questions

This question is used to elicit or draw information. We frequently talk about 6 W's + H.

This stands for Who? What? Where? When? Why? Which? And How?

For example:

- “Why, if I may ask did you decide not to go for the cover?”
- “Where do you think we can assist you better in the future?”
- “How do you want us to assist you better?”
- “What are the reasons for you not being interested?”

If you ask well directed questions, it will help you to remain in control of the conversation. You will be able to direct and channel the conversation and keep that professional touch.

Fact: If you ask well-directed questions, your customers will perceive you to be much more genuine and interested.

Don't be afraid of asking Open Ended Questions.

Fact: Questions will show the customer that you're really interested in what they think. This will help to build that trust relationship between the customer and your company.

After asking a well directed question you must always stop talking and start listening. The question has no meaning if you answer it yourself. You ask a question to gain information, not by wasting your breath.

Fact: Research shows that if an agent interrupts a customer while they are speaking, there is an 89.9% chance of that customer losing trust in you. 76.5% of customers that are interrupted by agents become irate.

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN...!

One of the most important elements of communication is listening, yet it is one of the skills that we think we do so well but experience tell us different. When we feel that someone has listened to us we truly feel appreciated. That is why it is important in all interactions to listen. Listen to understand as well as to what is being said.

You can learn to be a better listener. Sometimes it is wise to just let the other person talk and you are quiet rather than offering solutions or advice before you have all the facts and information on the problem. You were given two ears and one mouth. Ensure that you use them in the correct ratio: twice as much listening as talking.



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How can listening skills be improved?

Make notes of what is being said and look at the person. By looking at the person you make them feel important. Listen carefully so that you will be able to understand, comprehend and evaluate. Careful listening will require a conscious effort on your part. You must be aware of the verbal and non-verbal messages (reading between the lines)

- Be mentally and physically prepared to listen. Put other thoughts out of your mind. Your attention will be diverted from listening if you try to think of answers in advance
- You can't hear if YOU do all the talking. Don't talk too much
- Listen with empathy. See the situation from the other's point of view. Try to put yourself in their shoes
- Listen to how something is said. Be alert for what is left unsaid. Sometimes it is wise to just let the other person talk and you are quiet rather than offering solutions or advice before you have all the facts and information on the problem.
- Make certain that everyone involved gets an opportunity to voice their opinions. Don't let one person dominate the conversation
- Face those you are talking to, lean slightly forward and make eye contact. Use your body to show your interest, concern

GOLDEN RULE

- **Look interested and pay attention**
- **Investigate with questions**
- **Stay on Target. Don't be side tracked**
- **Test for understanding**
- **Evaluate the message**
- **Neutralise your feelings**

12 Summary

Customer Care Pro's don't wait for things to happen, they make things happen.

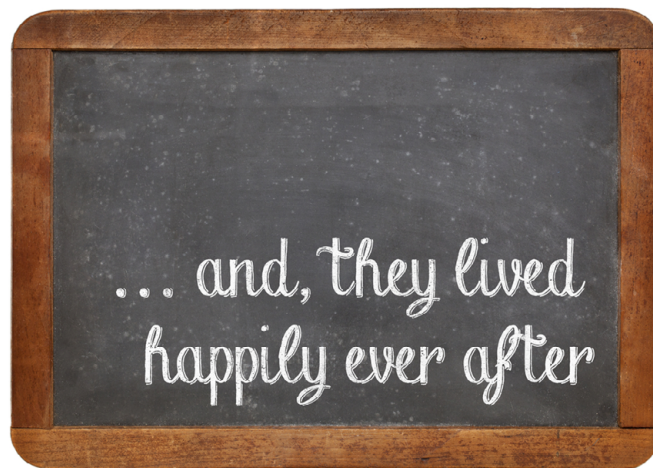
To be tenacious in all situations, without pestering customers, is a skill easily acquired. Bite your tongue and open your ears.

We find too many front line staff give up too easily and assign blame.

Top Customer Care Pro's take responsibility for all aspects of the situation even beyond ordinary boundaries and develop the ability to nurture success in any situation.

They turn problems into opportunities, displaying determination to succeed against all odds.

That's where you are right now – so take your first steps to success.



“Whether you think you **can**
or whether you think you **can’t**
either way, you’re normally **right**”

Henry Ford

About The Authors

CLIVE C. PRICE



The consummate sales maestro, Clive can orchestrate any sales dialogue into a *win-win* for all. Pushing the boundaries of learning, he has successfully trained thousands of delegates around the world who have all experienced the ‘*ka-ching*’ factor from his unique brand of training. The naughty chuckle in his eyes is perhaps typical of an entrepreneurial thinker, who has turned the conventional ways of selling upside down.

Clive is Managing Director of The Peer Group in South Africa and has a BA (Econ) from Wits University and a post-graduate diploma in Learning Psychology from London University. He has an astute grasp of what it takes to succeed in sales and business and is delighted to publish this third book in the series.

Books include:

- **Simple Alchemy: Turn Cold Calls into Gold Calls**
- **Summiting Sales**
- **Customer Care or Nightmare!**

Clive is happy to take any questions you may have arising from any of these books clive@peergroup.co.za

JEAN B. DEAN



After many years in the corporate world of fashion, retailing and publishing, her entrepreneurial spirit won out and Jean became the founder of a successful design & marketing agency www.bddesign.co.uk as well as several other businesses.

Delivering blue-sky thinking, ensuring new ideas are continually being born and delivered to market, plus having clients come back for more is her main motivator.

Jean is delighted to have this third book published, to assist salespeople to have the best chance of succeeding, fully endorsing the saying that **'success breeds success!'**